

Climate and Health E-News

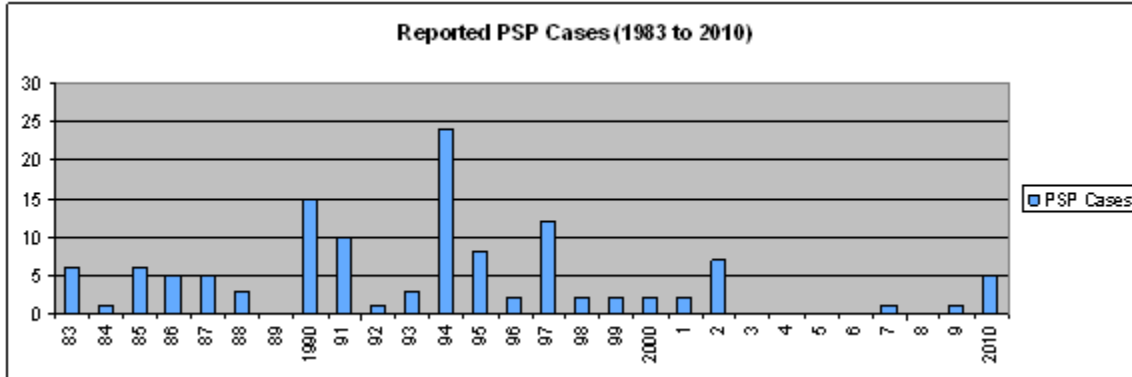
Raising Awareness and Connecting People in the Interest of Public Health

No. 22, July 2, 2010

Rash of June Shellfish Poisoning Cases in Southern Alaska - The [Anchorage Daily News](#) reports that there have been five reported cases of suspected paralytic shellfish poisoning in the month of June, including two deaths. Three people were sickened around June 13th after eating butter clams from Chiniack Beach on Kodiak Island. Then on June 17, a Juneau woman died after eating cockle shells from Auke Bay. Then on June 21st a 57 year old man died one day after being released from Bartlett Memorial Hospital in Juneau. He had eaten Dungeness crab from Jenkins Rock near the Chilkat Inlet of Lynn Canal in Haines. See the map on the [CCH home page](#) for the PSP event locations. PSP is not normally found in crab *meat* but it can occur in the "mustard" or the guts of crab. PSP is a neuro-toxin related to blooms of marine algae, that can paralyze respiratory muscles. Symptoms of poisoning can begin immediately or up to several hours after ingestion and can include tingling of the lips, skin or fingertips, shortness of breath, dry mouth, double vision, diarrhea, dizziness and numbness. Immediate medical care is advised upon the emergence of these symptoms.

Shellfish that are sold commercially in Alaska are routinely tested for PSP and are considered safe to eat. However, for many of the non-commercial shellfish harvest areas around Alaska, there is no monitoring of PSP levels. The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services advises *never* eating any non-commercial shellfish harvested from Alaska waters. Despite this, shellfish continues to be an important subsistence and sport harvest for thousands of Alaskans. A [Bulletin](#) has been prepared by the State of Alaska, Department of Public Health describing the recent cases.

Temperature and warming water are two factors associated with PSP algal blooms, and there is growing evidence that climate change may be increasing the seasonal period and the locations where PSP and other harmful algal blooms (HAB) can occur. In Alaska, the vast majority of poisoning events (1973-1994) have occurred between May and July, almost exclusively in southern Alaska ([RaLonde, 1996](#)). Some Alaska Native communities routinely avoid harvest of shellfish during the warm months. The Agdaagux Tribe in King Cove, on Alaska's Southwest Peninsula, has adjusted their community shellfish harvesting based on the results of a four year EPA funded monitoring program where local harvesters collected butter clams and the tribal environmental program submitted samples to the state laboratory for analysis ([data attached](#)). The program is on-going at the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association and is providing a community specific data on PSP levels, and periods of highest risk. Please see the attached King Cove data and the Alaska Marine Advisory Program Bulletin which provides an excellent primer on PSP.



Prepared by Center for Climate and Health (Source: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services)

If you have an observation or an update you would like to include in our E-News or have added to our [Alaska Climate Events Map](#), send a message to mbrubaker@anthc.org. To join the E-News mailing list, just respond to this message with your contact (e-mail/name) information. Click [> here](#) for prior E-News archived at the Arctic Health library.

Regards - Mike

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